

## Moving Mysteries: The Jairus Howland House

By DEBORA BABIN KATZ

Researching an old house is often an exasperating, tedious task starting with the Deed of Registry and historical societies, then pouring through old

maps, town censuses, cemetery records, and even a trip to the Massachusetts Archives in Boston to dig up some long forgotten wills. It's a labor of love; done with either a keen set of eyes or a

good magnifying glass (in this writer's case, both.)

The search, however, becomes even more difficult when an antique dwelling is moved—a frequent occurrence back in the days of Yankee thrift and lumber shortages—to another parcel of land. Then, add to the pot of

complexity a property near a town border whose owners straddle two communities, and you have the Jairus Howland house at 446 Summer Street. Lovingly restored by home-

owners Paulette and Dick Harris, this antique Cape Cod is currently date-boarded 1851 though architectural clues and some recent findings point to an early 1700s date.

In 1851, thirty-four year old Jairus Howland bought a half acre lot along what is now Summer Street (once part of the old highway to Boston also known as the Old Massachusetts Path or Bay Path of 1685) for a mere seven dollars and fifty cents from neighboring Elbridge



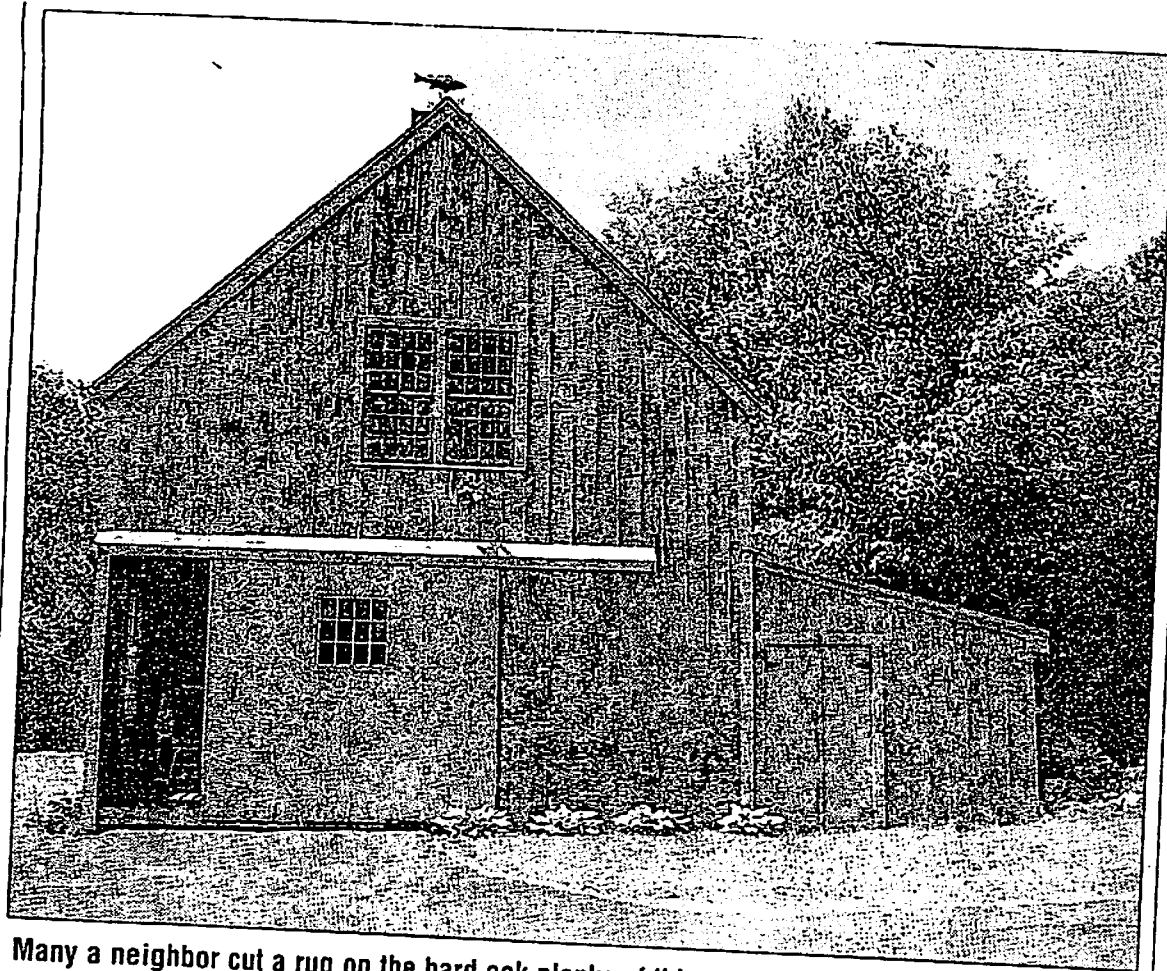
The Jairus Howland House at 446 Summer Street is a restored treasure with a history that spans beyond its 1851 date-board.

Photos by D.B. Katz



Chandler.

Howland, a Pembroke native whose family owned a saw mill on Pine Meadow Brook in that town, was living comfortably and raising a family with his wife Deborah Fish Howland. Apparently, his interest in the Duxbury



Many a neighbor cut a rug on the hard oak planks of this two story barn—complete with three upstairs rooms and a loft—earning it the name, “the Dancing Barn.”

property was for speculation (he never lived there.) A year later he sold it, this time with buildings, for a hefty \$100 to Daniel S. McLauthelin and James H. Weston of Duxbury who then sold the place in 1854 for \$200 to Ezra J. Ford, a native of Maine.

Ford was such a prominent name along this old pathway that the area took on the name Fordville. “There were Fords on both sides of the highway, mostly farmers but some carpenters and ship builders, and all respected citizens,” according to former town historian Dorothy Wentworth. Ezra Ford was a farmer and shoemaker, and the property was an ideal location for his business as he could easily take receipt of cut leather from nearby tanners or larger shoe enterprises in Abington, Brockton and Rockland who also shipped partially completed shoes for local shoemakers, like Ezra, to finish.

The Fords had four children, Ezra H. who became an apprentice in his father’s shoemaking business and daughters Hannah B., Wealthea J. and baby Amelia A. For the next thirty-one years the couple retained ownership in the property even after moving to the shoe making Mecca of Massachusetts, Brockton.

After Ezra Ford’s death in 1877, Wealthea remarried Lewis Delano of East Bridgewater, but continued to own the property until 1885 when for \$300 she sold it, along with an adjoining \_ acre lot to Harry Sampson.

In 1887, Nahum Sampson, a 57 year old Duxbury farmer, bought the property though it is uncertain whether he resided here. By 1896, the same year he expanded the property by buying 6 \_ acres of adjoining land, he was living in Kingston and working for that town’s highway department. He may have farmed the land or rented it to other local farmers.

In 1902, Sampson shed more light on the house’s past than anyone before when he sought to clear his title to the property. His confirmatory deed discloses the existence of another deed that was lost, and never recorded, in which Eldridge Chandler sold a lot of land to Ezra J. Ford that adjoined the original lot “upon which the said Ezra J. Ford’s house was placed” and being the land that Elbridge Chandler sold to Jairus Howland in 1851. For those who enjoy reading the nuances of old deeds, the

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word "place" is an important find as it signifies that a dwelling was not built but rather moved, and its interesting that the dwelling is described as Ezra J. Ford's house.

To some degree, this confirmatory deed solves the date mystery since we now know that the house was not built here in 1851. But when was it actually built? And who owned it originally? Howland? Ford? The search for answers begins again (hence the tedious task of date boarding.)

Unfortunately, so often houses were moved, and even moved again, without a paper trail. It's possible that Ezra J. Ford was the first owner-occupant as the 1902 deed suggests. He may have inherited a house and moved it to the location after obtaining a gentlemen's agreement with Howland to rent the land until he was established and could buy it. Or, Howland may have moved an old dwelling here to increase the return on his investment.

The architectural clues such as post and beam construction, hearths, and moldings point to an early 1700s date. "The kitchen ceiling beams are hand hewn and are of varying dimensions," said resident, Pauline Harris. Roman numerals carved into the sills—a common practice when a property was moved—were also found. The Cape's quality workmanship and detailed moldings, mantelpieces and impressive alcove good morning stairwell are

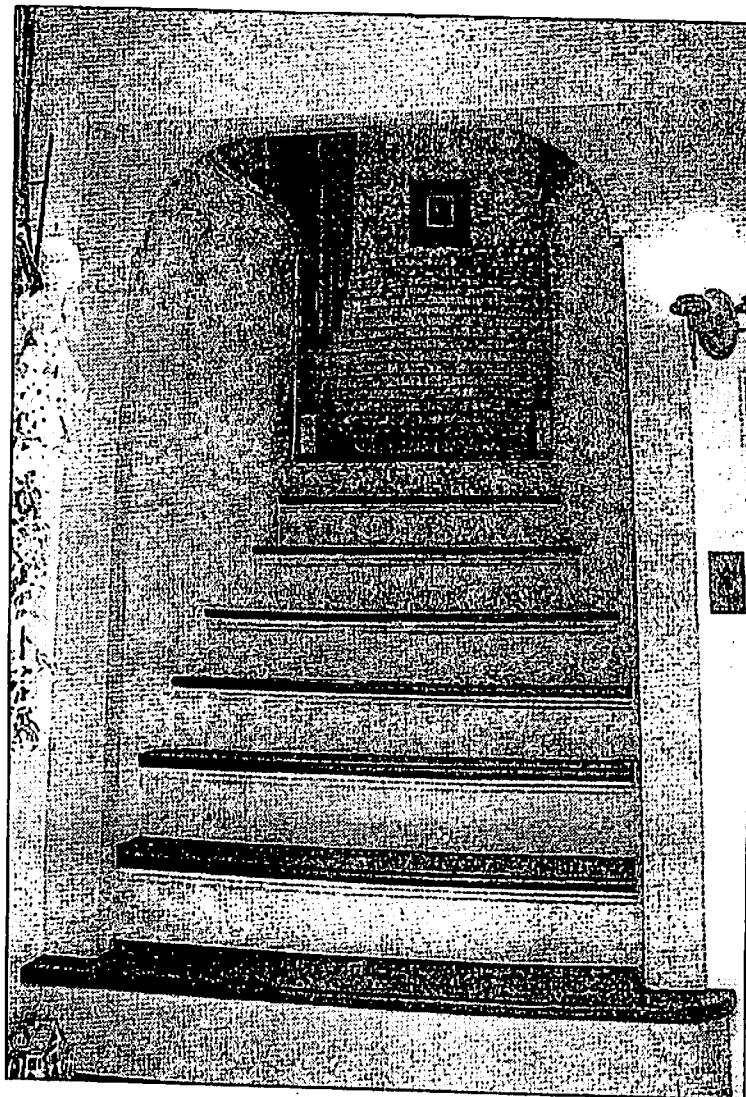


**In late 1930s through the 1940s, this six burner Garland gas stove with two ovens, broiler and grill served the locals and travelers from Boston to Plymouth during the home's restaurant days.**

more typical of a sea captain's home and add to the conundrum. To date, additional deed searches have not revealed the house's origin.

Other mysteries abound in The Jairus Howland House. During Prohibition, it may have operated as a holding pad for illegal liquor brought in off the shores of Duxbury. Author John McCaig, who owned the property with his wife Miriam from 1964 to 1972, recalled a story he was told: A card table and area rug located in a small room off the kitchen hid a trap door in the floor that led to a root cellar where the liquor was stashed. When the author-

ities came to search the house for contraband, the owners sat at the table playing cards with their guests, and nothing was ever found. The Harris family preserved the trap door when they converted the room to a full bathroom.



An architectural gem, the original good morning stairwell is built around the large center chimney and with impressive alcove flair.

Another mysterious legend surrounds the house. There are stories of its use during the Underground Railroad in which escaped slaves hid in a crawl space behind the formal parlor's paneled hearth area. For those adventurous minds, the nonsymmetrical wood work around the fireplace, including the fine pencil moldings, lends itself to the possibility of a secret passage. The home's location along the byway to Boston also enhances the tale.

Today, this massive central chimney still houses three working fireplaces and a beehive oven. "I've baked in it," said Paulette Harris referring to the beehive oven, "and got to use my great grandmother's bread peel to take the loaves out."

It's not the only historic stove. A six burner Garland gas stove with two ovens, broiler and restaurant styled grill graces the kitchen and once served both locals and traveling clientele when the house operated as The Chowder Bowl in the mid 1930s and later The Swedish Sandwich Shop.

In 1936, J. Percival Sears with his wife Janet "opened The Chowder Bowl, adding the ell in the rear which served as the dining area for guests," writes Margery MacMillan in *Stopping Places Along Duxbury Roads*.

Then, Walter and Harriette Anderson bought the property in 1946, changed the restaurant's name to The Swedish Sandwich Shop, and offered Scandinavian cuisine, but

soon gave up on the restaurant and started an inn. They converted the large dining hall into two bedrooms and a bathroom, and used additional bedrooms in the barn.

The barn has its own unique history. Many locals cut a rug on its wide oak planks—giving it the name “The Dancing Barn”—where young love flourished among neighborhood sweethearts.

When the Dick and Paulette Harris bought the property, they changed the back ell again. This time to a vaulted

ceiling Great Room with exposed beams, Southern yellow random wide pine floors (to match the kitchen’s original pine floors,) skylights, and a half bathroom. “I also wanted my Nana’s porch,” said Paulette Harris. So they designed the space to include a side entry farmer’s porch, and adorned it with signs from The Chowder Bowl days that they found in the barn, along with an antique sign —“Dancing Every Evening.”—an anniversary gift that recalls the property’s hoedown days.

# JAIRUS HOWLAND

## 1851

D. R. H. S.

**Location:** 446 Summer Street, Duxbury

**Dateboard:** Jairus Howland, 1851

**Style:** Cape Cod

**Living Area:** 1967 sq feet

**Lot size:** .92 acres

**Rooms:** 7 Baths: 2 full, 1 half

**Bedrooms:** 3 Fireplaces: 3

**Special Historic Features:** Two-story barn, Good Morning staircase, mantel with pencil moldings, built ins, original wide pine floors, 3 working fireplaces with beehive oven, 6 burners Garland Stove from the days when The Chowder Bowl, and later The Swedish Sandwich Shop, operated here.

**Sale Price:** \$435,000

**Property Taxes:** \$3,868

**Listing Broker:** Joan Hick

**Listed By:** MacDonald & Wood 781-934-2443